

## Scabies Fact Sheet

### What is scabies?

Scabies is an infestation of the skin caused by the parasitic mite named *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Scabies mites are found worldwide and can affect people in all socioeconomic classes. The female mite burrows under the top layer of the skin to lay eggs and can remain there for 1 to 2 months. The eggs hatch and become adult mites within 10 to 15 days and can continue the infestation until proper treatment is applied.

### How is scabies transmitted?

Scabies is most commonly transmitted by having prolonged direct or frequent skin-to-skin contact with a person already infested with the mites, usually among sexual partners and household members. Scabies may also be transmitted through contact with an infested person's clothing, bedding, or towels (fomites). Nursing homes or extended-care facilities, child care facilities, and prisons often serve as sites for scabies outbreaks.

### The signs and symptoms of scabies are:

- Intense itching, especially at night and over most of the body;
- Presence of the mite burrow(s), often forming a zigzag or "S" pattern on the skin;
- Presence of rash or skin lesions such as red, raised bumps, blisters, brown nodules, or pimple-like irritations.

Common sites of infestation (skin lesions) include: between the fingers and toes, pubic and groin area, armpits, bends of elbows and knees, wrists, navel, breasts, lower portion of buttocks, penis and scrotum, and waist and abdomen. Scabies is rarely found on the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, or anywhere above the collar (neck and head).

### How long before symptoms appear?

In healthy people, if they have never been infested with scabies before, symptoms (itching and redness of the skin) appear approximately **2 to 6 weeks** after infestation. If a person has been infested with scabies before, he/she will begin to experience symptoms within 1 to 4 days after reinfestation because previous exposure to scabies will sensitize the skin (cause an allergic reaction).

### What does scabies infestation mean for my health?

Scabies does not usually cause anything more than discomfort and inconvenience. Secondary bacterial infections may occur due to aggressive scratching and usually requires treatment with antibiotics prescribed by a doctor.

Scabies should be treated as soon as possible; if diagnosis and treatment are delayed, the number of live mites can multiply resulting in heavier or atypical infestations. People with weakened immune systems and the elderly are at risk for crusted scabies, also known as Norwegian scabies, which is a more severe form of scabies. Because of the larger number of mites, crusted scabies is much more contagious than typical scabies, which is not easily passed on with direct skin on skin contact. Additionally, people with crusted scabies often do not show the typical signs and symptoms of scabies and may be misdiagnosed with psoriasis (scaly rash) or eczema (red, itchy skin).

### **How long can someone be contagious?**

A person with scabies can pass it on to another person as long as they have not been treated. Pieces of clothing and bedding of an infested person are considered infectious until properly washed or treated. After treatment, a person may unknowingly get re-infested by coming into contact with the same person who had scabies to begin with or with someone else who has scabies.

### **Can my pet give scabies to me?**

No. Other animals become infested with other types of mites (also known as mange), which can cause only temporary itching in humans, but not a long-lasting infestation.

### **How is scabies diagnosed?**

Diagnosis is most commonly made by looking at the mite burrows or rash. Sometimes a skin scraping can be used to look for mites, their eggs, or mite fecal material under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis. Other ways to check for mite infestations include applying ink or tetracycline solution to the skin, which is then wiped off with alcohol and the skin is examined to see if the characteristic zigzag or S pattern burrows appear.

### **How is scabies treated?**

Scabies can be treated by applying one of several available lotions or creams to the skin. The recommended treatment for scabies is 5% permethrin cream, though additional medications are available by prescription (i.e., crotamiton, sulfur ointment, benzyl benzoate). Patients should always follow the directions provided on the medication label or by their physician. All clothes, bedding, and towels used by the infested person for the 2 days before treatment should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer, dry cleaned, or sealed in a plastic bag for 7 days. Mites do not usually live for more than 2 to 3 days in the environment (off a person).

**How soon after treatment will an infested person feel better?**

If treatment is successful, the itching and presence of a rash should slowly go away over a 2 to 3 week period. Symptoms may get worse 1 to 2 days after treatment, due to the release of allergens from the killing of mites. If signs and symptoms continue or get worse or if new lesions are identified within 7 to 14 days, it is possible the treatment did not work and the skin should be retested.

**Scabies treatment summary**

- Seek medical attention as soon as you think you have scabies.
- Use medication as directed.
- Wash infested clothing and linen on the hot cycle setting. Dry on hot cycle for at least 20 minutes.
- Items that cannot be put in the washer and dryer may be dry-cleaned or placed in a bag for 7 days to kill any remaining mites.
- Furniture and carpeting should be vacuumed to get rid of mites. Dispose of vacuum bag afterwards.
- Fumigation of living areas is not necessary.

**Other recommendations:**

- Notify and treat all sexual partners and household members of scabies.
- Abstain from intimate or sexual contact until treatment is successfully completed.
- Avoid sexual contact with infested partners.

**Where can I get more information on scabies?**

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/scabies/default.htm>

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